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ABSTRACT

In the past decade over 30,000 young college graduates from overseas have been employed in Japan by the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET). The stated goals of the program are to enhance foreign language education, to internationalize the country's viewpoint, and to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other countries. This study examines how JET participants from the West cope with the Japanese language as well as the country's cultural and social contexts. Using questionnaires, personal interviews, field observations, and local government documents, the effects of these Japanese influences on the activities of and attitudes held toward Japanese society by these young visitors living in rural Japan are analyzed. The specific focus of the research is their initial motivation to come to Japan, language proficiency, cultural adaptation strategies, and attitudes towards Japanese and work. It was found that there is no significant relationship between the JET participants' acquisition of Japanese and their acculturation. JET participants experienced difficulties in interactions with Japanese speakers because of such social and psychological constraints as culture shock, low self-esteem, personal inhibitions and motivation, and attitudes toward the host society. (Contains 13 references.) (KFT)

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ED 452 725

Working as a Foreign English Teacher in Rural Japan:

JET Instructors in Shimane Prefecture

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ABSTRACT

In the past ten years alone, 30,000 young college and university graduates from overseas have been employed by the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, jointly sponsored by the Japanese Education, Foreign Affairs, and Home Affairs Ministries. The program's stated goals are to enhance foreign language education, to internationalize the country's viewpoint, and to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other countries. Teacher-participants face many linguistic and cultural challenges during their time in Japan, but they also do not feel pressure to give up their native language and cultural identity in the same way that immigrants to such English-speaking countries as the US have historically been required to do. This study examines how JET participants from the West cope with the Japanese language as well as the country's cultural and social contexts. Using questionnaires, personal interviews, field observations, and local government documents, the author analyzes the effects of these Japanese influences on the activities of and attitudes held toward Japanese society by young Western college and university graduates living in a rural area in Japan. The specific focus was on their initial motivation to come to Japan, language proficiency, cultural adaptation strategies, and attitudes toward Japanese and work. Despite local government expectations and support, many foreigners struggle with their jobs and communication problems with native Japanese, especially in rural areas. However, a significant number are highly motivated to acquire the Japanese language, partly because they are immersed in a natural linguistic setting, and partly because JET participants maintain a high status in many Japanese communities.

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Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) entails the language production process and recognition of the social role of language, in a balance which is not yet fully understood. However, the latter is clearly associated with social identity: Peirce (1993) points out that a) adult second language learners are more likely to acquire a target language (TL) if they consistently socialize with native speakers, and b) many adults fail in this area due to the lack of opportunities for such interactions. This partly explains why many American SLA researchers mistakenly focus on individual rather than social-historical variables when analyzing why so many immigrant adults fail to acquire a TL, and why many overlook such sociopolitical issues as unemployment or underemployment, economic downturns, and social mobility (Tollefson, 1991).

In Japan, very little research has been conducted on acculturation and SLA, even though the number of clear examples of linguistic imperialism in the country has increased during the past few decades. As residents of a peripheral English-speaking country, Japanese are increasingly following the linguistic norms of core English-speaking countries. In response to the growth of English as an international language for business, the Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) program was launched in public schools nationwide in 1987 by then-Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (Bridges, 1998). Since its inception, a substantial number of foreign college and university graduates from the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand have been employed by the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Home Affairs. Many young, inexperienced foreigners have found work in Japan teaching English, doing translation, and assisting local foreign affairs offices for local governments.

The high status typically given to government employees in Japan has resulted in strong financial, political, and social support being given to JET employees by rural communities. Nevertheless, some of these foreign workers have struggled during their time in Japan. In an attempt to understand their difficulties, I looked at how foreign teachers operate in Japanese

classrooms, how they feel when learning and speaking the Japanese language, and how they cope with Japanese social demands in isolated rural areas. Based on the results of my search, I looked for relationships between acculturation and SLA success among JET teachers. Here I will report on my content analysis of data collected by means of open-ended questionnaires, personal interviews with six foreign language teachers, field observations, and official JET program documents.

The data will be used to discover if many non-native Japanese speakers working overseas fail to learn the TL due to a) socio-linguistic demands that require them to use unfamiliar speech styles and non-standard accents in their new environments, b) a general lack of opportunities to socialize with native speakers, or c) a simple lack of desire to learn the TL. A search was also made for signs of SLA failure, including low self-esteem, self-blame, and linguistic difficulties being made worse by the negative non-verbal behavior they perceive as coming from native speakers (Brockner, 1983).

Hypotheses

The three hypotheses that were tested for this report were:

1. Social, emotional, and psychological constraints generally exist for foreign teachers in rural Japanese communities.

2. Assumptions regarding cultural and social contexts affect foreign workers' attitudes toward living in foreign communities, but not second language acquisition motivation.

3. Social and communicative interactions with native speakers provide important psychological and emotional support in the early stages of the integration process.

Literature Review

In the US, ethnic minorities feel pressure to assimilate linguistically and culturally in order to achieve social and economic mobility. Historically, immigrants to America have had to give up

their native languages and cultures in return for accepting a new ideology (Hakuta, 1986). The immigrant situation in America has created an enormous laboratory for testing theories on social factors and how they affect SLA. One of the most influential theories, Schumann's Acculturation Model, suggests that acculturation is the primary causal variable in successful adult immigrant SLA. He argues that SLA success for this particular group depends on individual attitudes toward acculturation—in other words, that attitudes and social behaviors are important elements determining successful adaptation into the TL society. For example, if an immigrant group chooses preservation as its primary integration strategy, it will tend to hold more strongly to its own traditions and values and to reject those of the dominant TL group. In terms of social factors, Schumann argued that if an immigrant group views itself as politically, culturally, and technologically superior to the dominant TL group, its members are less likely to learn the new language. It is possible that this argument explains the SLA activities (or lack of) of JET teachers living and working in Japan.

Schumann has many supporters and critics in the SLA research community. Norton (2000) also looked at adult immigrants learning a new language in Canada, and reported on the perceived need of self-confidence to manage the English language requirements of daily transactions. She found that the lack of opportunities for interacting with native speakers stopped many adult immigrants from overcoming their perceptions of psychological and social isolation from the TL society. However, Kim (1979) and many other researchers have noted the perception in Asian immigrant communities that linguistic skill is *the* key to integration and assimilation into societies where English is the first language. In an earlier study, Kim (1977) also reported on the need to master a broad range of social requirements, which many Asian immigrants perceive as including customs, values, a strong self-image, and motivation.

Since learning a new language has long stood as a social, political, and cultural symbol of acculturation, there is a tendency for adult immigrants to become overly sensitive to ethnic and linguistic boundaries and thus grow isolated from the host society (Fishman, 1989; Wong, 1987).

This sense of isolation and loneliness can deter even the most highly motivated individuals from acquiring a new language and integrating into a new society (Schumann, 1986; Peirce, 1993). Other factors involved in the acculturation process that are based on linguistic and cultural differences include culture shock, low self-esteem, inhibition, and motivation.

Culture Shock

Brown (1980) outlined the four stages of acquiring English which most adult second language learners follow as initial excitement → culture shock → partial recovery mixed with "cultural stress" → full recovery in the form of acceptance of the new culture and self-development within it. Most adult immigrants arrive in a new country with little or no second language skills. After a few successful survival interactions with native speakers, it is usual for them to become very excited about learning the TL, with hopes of quickly acquiring the new language's idiomatic forms. Unfortunately for most, Brown's second stage (severe culture shock) usually occurs within weeks of the initial euphoria. In his words,

> Culture shock is a common experience for a person learning a second language in a second culture. Culture shock refers to phenomenon ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis . . . [and] is associated with feelings in the learner of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness. (p. 131)

Some adults experience culture shock to such a degree that they cannot ride a public bus or walk through an urban downtown area alone. Groups of adults sharing similar emotions may live in a state of self-enforced isolation—physical or psychological—which further disrupts the development of their interpersonal communication skills. During Brown's third stage (partial recovery), many adults begin to acculturate into their new environments. But this stage is also marked by frequent encounters with "cultural stress." In America, most adult foreigners report feeling discomfort primarily because of the difficulties associated with communicating with native speakers in their new language. The stress involved makes it difficult to initiate linguistically fruitful

interactions with native speakers. A large percentage of Asian immigrants and visiting students claim that their second greatest obstacle is eliminating their accents; many believe that native speakers perceive Asian accents as marks of inferiority and low intelligence, as well as triggers of certain Asian stereotypes (Wong, 1987).

In Brown's final stage, many immigrants and other foreign residents in Western countries learn that expressing their own feelings is considered acceptable—a realization that encourages many to challenge other strongly held beliefs (Ieda, 1991). However, a significant minority fail to achieve that insight, and therefore never take full advantage of their time in the host county. The transition is a source of stress for many members of minority communities in the US who have been told that maintaining their ethnic identities is a laudable goal, but who also feel great pressure to assimilate into the mainstream. Being identified in terms of race only (a frequent occurrence in the US) leads to confusion that can sharply affect the lives of foreign nationals and immigrants.

Low Self-esteem

Gardner (1991) identified low self-esteem and negative self-perceptions based on unsuccessful interactions with native speakers as major factors affecting adult SLA. Segalowitz (1976) observed that non-native speakers were less secure using their second language during casual interactions compared to more formal situations—the opposite of most native speakers. His explanation was that the socio-linguistic demands of informal social situations require non-native speakers to use unfamiliar speech styles; when they fail to use these correctly, adult non-native speakers often feel a loss of self-esteem because of negative non-verbal communication displayed by native speakers. According to Brockner (1983), this sense of low self-esteem is correlated with increased self-blame and increased incompetence in producing the TL.

Inhibition

Brown (1980) argued that "The notion of self-esteem is the concept of inhibition" (p. 105). Compared with children (who have less need for ego protection), adult second language learners feel much more inhibited during interactions with native speakers, since it is very difficult for them to

accept a new identity that entails a lower status. This difficulty is made worse when they perceive that they are being treated in a child-like manner—e.g., baby talk, condescending comments, or puzzled and critical facial expressions. The consequent embarrassment may cause an non-native speaker to avoid new opportunities for interactions.

Adult immigrants and foreign nationals tend to get information (especially from the media) in their first language, which further restricts opportunities to interact with native speakers. Their cognitive and linguistic self-awareness frequently makes them hypersensitive to their limitations, thus adding to their sense of discouragement and their desire for isolation (Buring, 1981; Peirce, 1993). They may never go beyond the ability to translate everything they see, hear, or feel into their native language, which Brockner (1983) and Segalowitz (1976) identified as self-handicapping behavior.

Motivation

Since many adult foreigners who travel to the US to study or work are highly motivated to study English and American culture, it is important to discuss Lambert and Tucker's (1972) motivation theory of language learning. They argued that second language learners have one of two orientations: a) instrumental, which emphasizes the practical or economic advantages of learning a second language; and b) integrative, which emphasizes social, societal, and cultural interests. As Spolsky (1969) succinctly stated, the greater the interest in joining a new community, the faster an individual learns its language.

In the United States, speaking "good English" is an important value for many Americans. Historically, English has been used as an instrument of political, social, and economic control resulting in social stratification (Wily & Lukes, 1996). This creates a paradox for foreigners wishing to learn their host country's language: opportunities for interactions with native speakers are decreased because of the attitudes of people who believe that immigrants should make the effort to learn "their" language.

Research Questions

1. What social and psychological constraints exist for foreign language teachers in rural Japanese communities?

2. How do JET members go about trying to acculturate into rural Japanese communities? In other words, what strategies do they use to survive in Shimane Prefecture?

3. Is there any relationship between adaptation strategies and SLA among the JET members studied for this report?

Language and Cultural Influence in Japan

Worldwide there are currently 350 million native speakers and an estimated one billion non-native speakers of English. According to Phillipson (1992), the dominance of English is the result of linguistic imperialist policies pushed by Great Britain and the United States, plus the tendency of "periphery English-speaking countries" (e.g., Japan) to follow the linguistic norms of core English-speaking countries. Japan has been dramatically affected by the increasing dominance of English during the past two decades. One result is that the Japanese government has de-emphasized the teaching of indigenous cultural values and differences between Japan and the west. Ever since the post-World War II American occupation of their country, Japanese have tended to follow an ideology in which the Western world is viewed as superior in terms of society and culture.

Japanese television programs, newspapers, and magazines often use English words, even though the majority of Japanese do not understand their meanings. Many young Japanese language learners arrive in America unable to communicate with native speakers because their "media English" is insufficient for such interactions. Television programs frequently use actors of white European descent for advertising and on television talk shows, even when they have no particular expertise. Many young Japanese therefore create a mistaken image of America as a superior country in terms of personal capabilities, culture, and language. Law (1998) argues that "English as a set of arbitrary rules best fits the reconstruction of the post-war years" (p.218), and

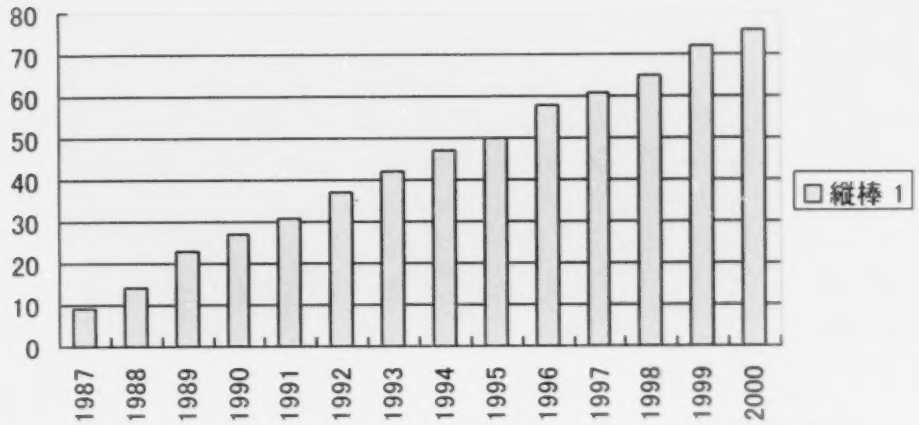
that the purpose of English education has not been adequately focused on communication. English as a foreign language is taught in senior and junior high schools—an age during which adolescents are fascinated by NBA basketball, American pop songs and movies, and European fashions. Many students, with the help of media images, tend to imagine western culture as more advanced that Japan's, and blonde, blue-eyed westerners as superior to Japanese. English-speaking visitors in Japan tend to be treated better than Asian visitors and immigrants in Western countries (Wong, 1987). On the other hand, it is important to remember that Japanese cultural norms are also viewed as a major obstacle to successful second language acquisition by outsiders (Brown, 1980).

Japanese Exchange Teaching (JET) Program

Since the JET program was started in 1987, approximately 30,000 young college and university graduates have traveled to Japan to work as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs). ALTs are placed by local boards of education to teach English in public junior and senior high schools under the guidance of Japanese English-language teachers. CIRs work for the governments of prefectures, cities, towns, villages or related private organizations engaged in such international activities as cultural exchanges. SEAs comprise the newest JET category; as its name implies, its purpose is to promote international exchange through sports. This year, approximately 5,000 young foreigners have been invited to work in Japan. This is a substantial increase from the first year of the JET program, during which only 848 young people from the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand were accepted (Japan Ministry of Education, 2001).

Table 1 presents data on the 76 foreigners currently working in Shimane Prefecture, located in the southwestern region of Honshu Island along the Sea of Japan. According to the Board of Education in Shimane (2001), eight cities and four islands in the eastern section of Shimane are so small that JET participants in those locations have only one work option: schools that serve relatively large geographic areas.

Table 1. Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Shimane Prefecture, 2000.



This presents special challenges, and while some JET teachers thrive in rural areas and work in the same setting for three years, others barely make it through one year. The prefectural government generally supports requests for transfers within Shimane, but cannot meet the wishes of many inexperienced teachers with a lack of Japanese languages skills who suddenly realize that they have signed up for a year's worth of service in very isolated areas.

Study Participants

Study participants were chosen based on the following criteria: a) foreign graduates of a college or university, b) employed by the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, or Home Affairs, c) working in local communities within Shimane Prefecture, and d) between the ages of 21 and 32 upon their initial arrival in Japan. The six ALTs that were interviewed for this study work for six separate senior high schools.

JET Documents

Local government documents provided important information on the JET program, including the educational backgrounds and historical records of Shimane ALTs. Local government offices

also distribute JET newsletters that describe the participants' activities and attempt to establish a communications channels among ALTs, Japanese school teachers, and local education boards. Besides helping to establish demographic data, the local offices also provided background information on JET participants and their interactions with Japanese people, which helped me to prepare interview questions.

Interviews

A prefectural administrative office distributed information on my research project to JET liaisons in junior and senior high schools—usually Japanese English teachers who met with the ALTs on a daily basis. Six ALTs living in four Shimane cities agreed to take part in three one-hour private interviews. The open-ended interview questions were designed to elicit data on a) the subjects' general perceptions of their team-teaching assignments and cultural contexts, and b) language contact and interactions with Japanese in their local communities. I also had numerous informal conversations with other ALTs and their Japanese advisors.

Personal Observations

I was given permission to observe the teachers' classrooms and had frequent telephone conversations with the subjects, during which we used both Japanese and English. Additional opportunities for observations that helped me to understand the personal and professional contexts of JET teachers included a Shimane prefectural government-sponsored conference and conversations with Japanese English teachers.

Acculturation Questionnaires

Acculturation questionnaire items focused on a) the JET participants' initial motivations to live and work in Japan, b) language proficiency, c) cultural adaptation strategies, and d) attitudes towards Japan, Japanese and the work that the JET teachers were doing. In all, 95 ALTs, CIRs, and SEAs working in Shimane were sent questionnaires with explanatory cover letters written in English, ¥1,000 telephone cards, and self-addressed, stamped envelopes for returning the completed questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The primary goals of this study were to a) understand what social and psychological constraints exist for foreign language teachers in their workplaces and general communities, b) describe the influence of social context on the foreign language teachers' perceptions of their new environments; and 3) discern how their perceptions of social interactions affect their motivation to learn Japanese.

Accomplishing these goals required analyses of both individual and community relationships in order to accurately interpret my field observations and to determine support or refutation for the research hypotheses. My main task was to identify and focus on the descriptive highlights of the interviews, questionnaire responses, and field observations that were most closely associated with the issues of acculturation and language development.

Results and Discussion

The survey questionnaire return rate was just under 70% (67 of 95). Table 2 presents information on the respondents' ages, home countries, marital statuses, educational backgrounds, and lengths of stay in Japan. As Table 2 shows, 45% of the survey respondents were in their second year of the program, and 13% were in their third. Four of the six persons interviewed were in their first year, and one of these was hoping to move to another city in the prefecture. The other two, both of whom were in their second or third year of working in Japan, said that they were satisfied with their positions and salaries. A substantial number of JET teachers—including first-year ALTs and CIRs—reported wanting to continue working in Shimane, mostly because of the good pay, job security, the fun associated with living in a foreign country, and the wish to pursue linguistic and cultural interests. Five of the six ALTs who agreed to be interviewed were planning to stay one more year.

TABLE . questionnaires-67 Jet members

Age	22	26 (%)
	21	26
	23	19
	24	9
	25	8
	26	5
	31	3
Home country	US	40 (%)
	Canada	22
	England	22
	New Zealand	9
	Australia	7
Marital status	Single	99 (%)
	Married	1
Study field	Japanese	27 (%)
	History	27
	Psychology	13
	Business	10
	Education	7
	Linguistics	7
	Chemistry	3
Length of stay	6 months	45 (%)
	18 months	42
	30 months	13

The exception, Andy, openly admitted that he was ready to leave Japan for personal reasons, including dissatisfaction with his work situation. The other five also complained about the state of English teaching in their high schools and the problems associated with implementing a new team-teaching approach, but their salaries and travel opportunities seemed to make up for these drawbacks.

Table 3 presents personal data on the six ALTs who were interviewed for this study. The six, all between the ages of 22 and 25, are currently teaching at the senior high school level. Their work schedules, which are dependent on school policy and the needs of their Japanese English teaching co-workers, might be considered unusual: some were asked to teach at a second school in the same area due to the small number of foreign language teachers available in rural sections of Shimane Prefecture.

Table 3. Personal backgrounds of the six high school teachers interviewed for this study.

Name	Amy	Joe	Cathy	Paul	Andy	Alex
Age	24	22	23	21	24	23
Marital Status	single	single	Single	single	single	Single
Major	Education	History	Math	History	Japanese	Business
Length of Stay	18 months	6 months	18months	6months	6months	6months

The interviewees represented a cross-section of enthusiasm levels and attitudes among JET participants. Amy, a Canadian with teaching experience in her home country, was in her second year of teaching in Japan, and her experience was reflected in the confidence she showed in her classroom. She plans to leave Shimane at the end of the current school year. Joe, a 22-year-old American, is an enthusiastic traveler inside Japan and to other Asian countries. He said that he planned to stay for an additional year of teaching. Cathy, a young British woman who said she loved her students, plans to stay in Japan for a third year. Paul, also from Great Britain and the youngest interviewee, has strong teaching skills. On the other hand, an American named Andy strongly disliked teaching English, claiming that he felt like a tape recorder because he had to repeat what the Japanese English teachers said; he wished for more independence in the classroom. Alex, another American, wanted to transfer to another city because of the small number of people his age in his community. None of interviewees used Japanese to converse with me, and their listening skills appeared to range from none to substantial, depending on the number of years spent in Japan.

All of the ALTs, CIRs, and SEAs working in Shimane were between the ages of 21-34 upon their initial arrival in Japan; the young average age is mostly explained by their decisions to join the JET program right after graduating from colleges and universities in their home countries. Only two individuals were in their 30s. In terms of country of origin, 40% were from America, 22% from Canada, 22% from Great Britain, 9% from New Zealand, and 7% from Australia. Recently, young foreign workers from non-English-speaking countries (e.g., France, Cambodia, and Hong Kong)

have been employed by local governments, but none so far have been invited to work in Shimane Prefecture.

As the questionnaire responses and personal interviews show, almost none of the JET participants were able to speak Japanese upon their arrival to the country, and few had more than a rudimentary knowledge of Japanese culture. This explains why—as was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews—it was very difficult for any of the JET ALTs or CIRs to communicate with local Japanese at the beginning of their experiences. Joe told me that because of his language problem, for two days he was unable to communicate to anyone that he had no water in his apartment. He partly blamed the local Japanese authorities for not checking up on him to see if he had any problems worth noting.

Motivation to Come and to Leave

Many young college graduates join the JET program for reasons of professional challenge, financial rewards, and the opportunity to explore Asian culture. Eight persons said that a major reason for their participation was a desire to learn Japanese. A primary motivating factor for many of the respondents was finding a job that would allow them to travel. All of the respondents mentioned hearing about JET through their universities, friends, ex-JET members, and advertisements placed by various Japanese consulates.

The great majority (74%) of participants reported feeling satisfied with their experiences and their current job situations, and no complaints were ever heard by the researcher regarding salary. Some mentioned that they felt ignored by their Japanese colleagues, either because the Japanese teachers were overworked or for other unnamed reasons. This may have affected their attempts to learn Japanese, since they were hesitant to interrupt Japanese English teachers for the purpose of practicing their conversation skills. Of all the respondents, the loudest complaint came from Andy, one of the six interviewees, who stated that he did not feel comfortable living in a rural area, and who was therefore applying for a transfer to a larger city. Eight ALTs had definite plans to

leave after one year; they named communication problems, negative perceptions of their Japanese communities, job dissatisfaction, and future plans as reasons for leaving.

Language Proficiency

Language skill is arguably the most important factor for adults wanting to function successfully in a foreign environment. It most certainly is an important tool for integrating into Japanese society. Very few of the respondents, however, participated in a Japanese language class, and only four said that they had participated in sports or tea ceremony classes. According to the questionnaire answers, 58 of the 67 respondents communicated with native Japanese on a daily basis, and the other 9 had only rare conversational interactions with their co-workers. In terms of regular social interaction, 22 foreign English teachers reported going out with their Japanese co-workers on a regular basis, 34 mentioned going out only when formally invited to participate in an *Enkai* (social party), and 10 stated that they never went out with their Japanese co-workers. As Peirce (1993) notes, daily conversation with native speakers is an important key for acquiring a second language, and it appears that those JET teachers who made the effort to interact with local Japanese were more successful in this regard.

The vast majority of the respondents had no formal training in Japanese prior to their arrival in Shimane, and therefore felt various degrees of discomfort when attempting to speak Japanese with native speakers. Despite feeling uncomfortable with their language skills, over 90% of the respondents admitted that their Japanese had improved during their tenure in Shimane. This may not be surprising in light of the large number of JET teachers who had no second language skills whatsoever at the beginning; the eight participants who had previously studied Japanese in their universities naturally built up their vocabulary and fluency through practice and study.

The learning curve for most of the Shimane JET teachers was very steep, since the majority had little prior interest or knowledge of Japanese culture, and a surprising number appeared unaware of the linguistic challenges they would face in a foreign country. Thus, some of their reactions to those challenges were very strong—e.g., one interviewee's comment that

"Sometimes I feel like I can't sound intelligent in Japanese . . . when a listener isn't patient, or doesn't try to understand me, I get frustrated—once to the point that I had to go to the bathroom to cry." The majority, however, gradually came to feel more comfortable when conversing with native speakers, and their self-assessments of their pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension skills improved. With greater success, many became more motivated to communicate and socialize with native speakers in their communities.

The six interviewees were all quick to state that they were treated well by school workers, but when asked for details, some complaints arose. One said that the Japanese English teachers they worked with were sometimes defensive about their own foreign language skills and clearly intimidated about conversing with young foreigners in English, and therefore pretended to always be busy with their work. Cathy was the only ALT to report having a regular on-going relationship with a Japanese teacher, stating that one of her female colleagues gave her a detailed description of the day's activities first thing every morning; Cathy was very thankful for this assistance, and stated her belief that she could not have functioned as well without her fellow teacher's help. She felt that this one close relationship helped her to build friendships with other Japanese teachers, to understand her students better, and to improve her own second language listening skills.

Cultural Adaptation Strategies

Successful acculturation requires strong communication skills that incorporate language, socialization abilities, value systems, and cultural knowledge (Kim, 1977; Peirce, 1993); those without cultural and linguistic knowledge tend to remain as outsiders in their new environments. Especially during the first year of living in a new country, adult foreigners often feel isolated, frustrated, and lonely when they encounter native speakers and when they perceive negative social behaviors and critical words. This explains why 89% of the respondents to the questionnaire mentioned feeling like "outsiders" in their Japanese communities. Only 9% reported feeling like outsiders "sometimes."

The great majority (90%) of JET participants knew the word "Gaijin" before they moved to Japan; it is often the first word learned by a foreign visitor. Spoken with laughter or a puzzled shake of the head, the word may sound negative or mocking to a newcomer, but its simple meaning is "person from outside." Just over two-thirds of the respondents (46) reported feeling annoyed, offended, or alienated when they heard the word; the others said that they did not mind because they were aware of their different physical appearance. One female interviewee said that whenever she heard the word spoken in a whisper and accompanied by giggles, she reacted strongly, hating all Japanese around her and viewing them as racists. However, one of the male interviewees said that he got used to the word because it followed him wherever he went.

Regardless of their reactions to this term and other minor xenophobic incidents, over half of the questionnaire respondents reported having feelings of isolation. What remains to be learned are how much this sense is related to language difficulties and how do these emotions affect further attempts to connect with people in the community and to learn Japanese.

Other collected data on acculturation were mixed. Most of the questionnaire respondents said that they regularly went out socially with other JET members. A small minority (11%) of ALTs said that they had made Japanese friends that they met on a regular basis for such activities as *Ikebana*, sports, and English conversation groups. Others did not mention a specific group for social activities. One ALT made the following comment on her survey form:

> Every now and then, I just get a feeling of being sick and tired of everything to do with Japanese people and language. During those times, I just watch an English movie and usually feel better after that. The first year I had feelings of bewilderment, confusion, helplessness, dependence on others, isolation, and general frustration. Sometimes the feelings would hit me so hard, I would cry—big, loud sobs—because I would usually be laughing at myself at the same time . . . I don't understand why people do things the way they do. For example, why does the homeroom teacher get held accountable for a student's behavior—most of which stems from life at home?

Her comments show classic symptoms of culture shock—a strong reaction to not understanding why the host culture does things differently from the way she is accustomed (e.g., holding the student accountable for his behavior). While more than half of the JET participants surveyed mentioned experiences with culture shock, almost one quarter (23%) said that they did not experience it at all, and at the same time were not concerned about acculturating into Japanese society. One respondent made the specific comment that the self-realization of culture shock may not come as a sudden insight, but often comes through the understanding of small, culturally bound errors such as walking out of a toilet room wearing toilet slippers.

Attitudes Towards Japanese and Teaching

While the tendency for adult immigrants and long-term visitors is to adapt culturally and socially to their host societies, only a minority of JET teachers appeared to have done so successfully, while the rest preferred to hold onto their own cultural identities. This may explain the confusion over what many Japanese might think of as a trivial matter: the use of the word "sensei." The word is commonly used in the literal sense of "teacher" and is considered an honorific for anyone viewed as having special knowledge—e.g., a politician, lawyer, or company president. As Nakane (1985) points out, the word is used by Japanese to acknowledge vertical social structure: anyone who is influential in a community can be called "sensei." Perhaps for reasons of political correctness, 64% of the survey respondents felt that because they were not qualified teachers and because they had no real classroom authority, they felt embarrassed to be addressed by the term.

The combination of written responses to open-ended questions and field observations, however, reveal a cultural gap that goes beyond the use of titles. Anyone who has gone through the Japanese public school system knows that high school students are aggressively negative toward foreign English teachers—ignoring their lectures, talking openly to each other during class, and not concentrating in their English conversation classes. The primary reason for such behavior is the belief of many students and their Japanese English teachers that conversation classes do not help in preparing for college entrance examinations. Instead, they concentrate on grammar,

reading, and writing skills. For this reason, many foreign English instructors lose interest in teaching after a few months, and many wonder why they chose to move to Japan in the first place. Their lack of understanding of the Japanese education system also marks their overall lack of understanding of Japanese cultural and societal values.

One JET interviewee commented on what she felt was the primary difference between Japanese and British education systems:

> Teaching in Japan is quite different to how I might have imagined it, especially so far as the behavior of students in class. It concerns attitudes about listening, walking around, and not wanting to learn. Although there are similar attitudes in Britain, there are not usually the same problems. It is simply not allowed at home.

Then there are the well-known differences in student attitudes towards risk—i.e., the reluctance of Japanese students to use verbal English for fear of making a mistake and being laughed at by their classmates. Many ALTs reported feeling frustrated with this attitude. Typical was this comment from Paul, who said that he sometimes felt unmotivated to teach because his students refused to speak English in his classrooms.

When teaching an oral communication class, Amy said that she had to speak in a very loud voice because her students were very noisy and usually not listening to what she was saying. She said that her Japanese co-teacher sometimes repeated in Japanese what she told her students in class, and so they sometimes followed commands without understanding the English words. In contrast, in the classes I observed being taught by Cathy and Chris, the students were very quiet and appeared to concentrate on the instructions given by both their foreign and Japanese teachers.

I observed a broad range of teaching approaches and lesson plans in use, depending on the Japanese English teacher in charge. Many of the JET teachers mentioned that they had problems with lesson continuity because their Japanese colleagues were too busy preparing their students for their national university entrance examinations, and therefore had little time to talk

about English conversation classes. All six of the JET interviewees questioned the purpose of teaching conversational English in Japanese high schools.

Discussion

The data collected for this project seem to support Schumann's (1977) idea that language competence is the primary determinant for English-speaking foreign workers' success in integrating into rural Japanese society. The results also indicate that Schumann's Acculturation Theory is inadequate for explaining the second language acquisition activities of English-speaking workers in Japan, as opposed to immigrants and other foreign nationals who desire to acculturate into American society. What remains unknown is whether their individual perceptions of working and living conditions, combined with cultural and linguistic knowledge, might have affected their motivation to integrate into Japanese society (Kim, 1977; 1979). In addition, the data indicate a relationship between dominant social patterns and individual motivation to learn a new language. The longer JET members stay in Japan, the greater their desire to integrate into Japanese society. However, evidence of a strong relationship between acculturation and SLA success was not found.

The situation for these young JET employees is socially different from that of immigrants to the US in terms of background, job status, and the positive attitudes held toward English-speaking foreign workers in Japan. According to Fishman (1999), the explanation for this difference is that "The Japanese turned away from Chinese culture, adopting many Western ways instead . . . Western language became the yardstick of what was useful, modern and good" (p. 403). JET teachers tend to feel more comfortable than other long-term foreign visitors or immigrants in Japan. This may explain why many of them do not feel motivated to learn Japanese—especially when the Japanese people they most frequently interact with already speak English well. There is some evidence showing that many JET members do not make strong individual efforts to learn Japanese (especially at the beginning of their teaching assignments), yet they claim to be highly motivated to integrate into Japanese society. In other words, learning the local language is not viewed by JET teachers as a key to acculturation, as it is by many immigrant groups in the US and other western

countries (Gardner, 1991). This contradiction might support Schumann's suggestion that members of immigrant groups who view themselves as politically, culturally, and technologically superior to their respective TL groups are less likely to learn a second language. At the same time, data gathered for the present study shows that the motivation of some JET teachers to learn Japanese changes from instrumental to integrative—a switch that might result in improved Japanese language skills.

Some of the Shimane JET participants expressed a strong desire to be successful teachers, but suffered from low self-esteem and workplace isolation that was in part brought on by their own avoidance of social situations. It appears that for most, their achievement motivation changed from integrative to instrumental during their stay in Japan, due to a combination of negative reactions from native speakers when trying to converse in Japanese plus the general attitude towards English language education found in Japanese high schools. On the other hand, English-speaking foreigners seem to generally enjoy their non-professional lives in Japan, since Japanese communities treat them well in terms of status, and because Japanese generally treat white foreigners of European descent with kindness and deference.

Regarding the primary research question, the six interviewees expressed concern over the social and psychological constraints they encountered, including low self-esteem, inhibition, and problems associated with cultural differences when conversing with native speakers. These constraints were in conflict with their initial motivations to work in Japan for reasons of money, safety, travel, and the opportunity to learn a foreign language. Some explanation for their feelings and attitudes can be found in self-perception theory. With the exception of Cathy, the interviewees felt uncomfortable during personal interactions in their communities due to their lack of oral Japanese competence, which made it difficult for them to meet appropriate social demands. Thus, 77% reported having major encounters with culture shock, which appears to be unavoidable during the early stages of cultural and linguistic adaptation. Even partly successful acculturation only

occurred when a JET teacher made an overt effort to build positive relationships with co-workers and other Japanese so that they could practice and refine their communication skills.

Buring (1981) found that perceptions of linguistic incompetence during social and business interactions with members of a TL group contribute to feelings of low self-esteem and trigger defensive reactions based on changes in a second language learner's identity. This may explain why many ALTs reported feeling pressure when trying to communicate with their students in Japanese; for some, their efforts enhanced their motivation to learn the language and to integrate into the school environment, but for others, this was a source of frustration and anger. Lambert (in Gardner, 1985) might explain such a situation in terms of pressure exerted by the TL community on the language learner, which usually results in feelings of low intelligence and low self-confidence in social situations (see also Segalowitz, 1976). Support for this contention can also be found in Brockner's (1983) finding that individuals who lack confidence in their own attitudes and behaviors "are especially apt to yield to other people's cues for socially appropriate feelings and actions" (p. 129). Accordingly, adult second language learners often deny their own sense of self-identity in favor of a new identity shaped by the host society.

Another explanation for the social and psychological constraints reported by the respondents is found in Brown's (1985) inhibition theory of effective domain. The Shimane JET teachers had a tendency to feel isolated from native speakers due to their own actions and attitudes, as well as those of local Japanese. The six ALTs who were interviewed for this study all reported socializing almost exclusively with other foreigners because they felt it was too difficult to make Japanese friends. Some felt that their Japanese teaching colleagues were always so busy that they could not even share their teaching plans prior to entering the classroom, let alone try to have a social conversation in order to practice their Japanese. In some cases, the respondents felt that the Japanese teachers were using their work burden as an excuse to avoid interacting with their foreign assistants.

Regarding job satisfaction, all of the ALTs reported having difficulties due to a) a lack of Japanese language skills and teaching experience, and b) cultural and social differences. As a result, most of the respondents said that they had lost interest in classroom teaching at some point during the school year. The data show that the majority of respondents and interviewees believe that the English instructional curriculum used in the JET program needs to be changed. Many made the comment that their situations differed from what they had originally expected. In Reed's study (1997), she expressed that many English teachers sat back and rode the waves, doing what they asked but losing interests in developing more meaningful and effective ways of teaching out their native language as a means of communication to the Japanese.

Even though JET ALTs are, for the most part, recent university and college graduates, and even though they have no teaching plans to begin with, they are nevertheless given the full status associated with all Japanese school teachers immediately upon their arrival. When paired with experienced Japanese English teachers, the result is frequently a complaint from the latter that the JET team teaching approach is ineffective. Miscommunication is common; Scholefield (1996) reports that many Japanese English teachers expect ALTs to interact with all students during classroom sessions, but this goal is often pushed aside in favor of preparation for entrance examinations. In addition, many Japanese English teachers feel torn between what are considered tried-and-true methods for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and their genuine desire to experiment with a team-teaching approach. Such a goal requires a large investment in preparation time—one that many overworked teachers are unwilling to make (Scholefield, 1996).

JET teachers face both linguistic and cultural barriers when creating their own teaching plans. Their difficulties support Hakuta's (1986) assertion that bilinguals enjoy a certain advantage over their monolingual counterparts in that they are better equipped to manage a task requiring "certain mental or symbolic flexibility" (p. 17). There is a distinct possibility that JET ALTs would be

more successful teachers if they participated in Japanese language classes prior to their arrival in Japan or during their stay.

However, they might still face cultural barriers. Many reported having difficulty when writing their teaching plans—in part because of their lack of understanding of Japanese decision-making processes. Japanese tend to discuss issues and to make decisions prior to meetings—that is, meetings are often considered formal channels for publicly declaring consensus on a question. The tendency to make pre-meeting decisions is known as *nemawashi.* Very few foreigners catch on to this concept very quickly, therefore they feel left out of the process and fail to understand the purpose of holding so many meetings. This is just one of many differences in the perceived roles of teachers in Japan and in western countries. The typical reaction of JET teachers after a few weeks or months is to resign themselves to following their Japanese colleagues' instructions on a daily basis.

The negative attitudes that some JET teachers perceive as coming from their colleagues and neighbors are similar to those perceived by immigrants and long-term visitors in the US and other western countries. Thus, in social situations they are keenly aware of their social and linguistic dislocation from the mainstream. A few of the respondents mistakenly interpreted some comments and physical reactions to their attempts at communication as signs of overt racism, and the constant stares that they received occasionally caused them to lose their tempers. Rarely were their reactions translated into more focused attempts to learn Japanese. Instead, their perceptions made them more angry about their isolation, and in some cases affected their motivation to work hard in their teaching positions. The frequency with which such situations occur raises questions about the overall effectiveness of the JET program.

Conclusion

The data failed to show a significant relationship between SLA and acculturation among JET members. The respondents and interviewees experienced difficulty in interactions with native

Japanese speakers because of such social and psychological constraints as culture shock, low self-esteem, personal inhibitions and motivation, and attitudes toward the host society. The form of achievement motivation for many of these adult second language learners changed from instrumental to integrative. With some exceptions, most have been unable to accept their new identities, yet they still show signs of being motivated by their cultural, social, and linguistic experiences in a foreign country. Further investigation into the issues discussed in this paper will require a more sophisticated questionnaire and a longer series of interviews over time. The list of social, psychological, and emotional variables that influence adult SLA is very long, requiring a series of research projects focusing on individual factors in order to truly understand the psychological constraints and motivations of any specific SLA group.

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